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ABSTRACT

A project was initiated by the Disabled Student Programs and Services (DSPS) division of California's Santa Barbara City College (SBCC) to provide training and information regarding psychological disabilities to the college community, review existing courses, and provide services to psychologically disabled students. The project was funded by a grant from the California Community Colleges covering the period from February, 1991 through June, 1992. At the outset, a psychological disabilities specialist was hired to administer the grant. A major focus of the project was to provide inservice training to faculty, staff, and administrators and disseminate information about the project to local agencies providing services to the psychologically disabled. In addition, SBCC courses were evaluated to determine which might provide educational support for these students while enrolled in a regular college curriculum. The courses were identified as ones which might help students increase self-awareness, self-esteem, or self-advocacy and improve social and study skills. The third focus of the project sought to provide appropriate services for students, including a thorough intake interview, case review by a mental health care professional, extended time for test-taking, use of tape-recorders, and tutorial help, among other services. During the project, the specialist provided services to 69 students, with the highest number of referrals coming from DSPS staff and other campus faculty. (MAB)

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College Services For Students With Psychological Disabilities: A Journey In Learning And Community Collaboration

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Abstract

The following article provides information about the Model Service Site project for students with psychological disabilities at Santa Barbara City College. The project was funded by a Chancellor's Office grant and covered the period from February, 1991 through June, 1992. This article relates the SBCC model and describes the collaboration between the DSPS department at SBCC with the SB County Mental Health Services, including findings from the peer support group.

The concept of providing services to students with psychological disabilities elicits various reactions from college personnel. Some fear that this population will take an inordinate amount of staff time, others fear that these students will cause excessive disruptions on campus, and some fear the disability itself. Acknowledging these fears and the need to examine them present two starting points for serving an underrepresented population. Santa Barbara City College (SBCC) Disabled Student Programs and Services (DSPS) received a Chancellor's Office grant to provide services to students with psychological disabilities and conduct research that would provide information that could help dispel these fears.

DSPS at Santa Barbara City College had developed both a mission and a vision statement which served as a philosophy for the department. The vision statement is one of "universally shared responsibility for fully integrated access." The mission statement reads:

> In order to achieve universally shared responsibility for fully integrated access DSPS will assess, motivate, educate, empower and reinforce people at individual, local, state, national and international levels because we acknowledge this is our ethical and moral responsibility.

This basic philosophy gave support to the inclusion of students with psychological disabilities as a population to receive services.

As a result of receiving a California Community College Chancellor's office grant as a Model Service Site for students with Psychological Disabilities, the DSPS department hired a psychological disabilities specialist to implement the grant. The SBCC approach covered three basic areas, education/information, course evaluation, and services/accommodations.

The first major area of the SBCC approach was the education/information aspect which included providing in-service training to faculty, staff, and administrators as well as disseminating information about the project to local agencies which provide services to those with psychological disabilities. The first part of this area of the project centered on visual aids and training information. An eleven minute multi-media slide show was developed in

conjunction with the SBCC media director, David Wong. The message of the slide show was that anyone, regardless of economic or ethnic background, age, or family-constellation, can have a psychological disability and that with supportive services and reasonable accommodations the individual can be successful in a college setting.

Two in-service trainings were developed. The first in-service training began with the slide show followed by a discussion of the participants' feelings, reactions, and questions. The criteria established for verification of a psychological disability was presented, along with myths about this population, factual information, and explanation of possible accommodations within the framework of the supportive education concept, while maintaining academic rigor. Participants received further information about both on and off-campus referrals, SBCC crisis intervention and disruptive student guidelines, as well as "scripts" to use with students who might need a referral.

The second in-service training developed as a result of the feedback from participants at the first training. This training focused on limit setting, boundaries, the concept of saving vs helping, and further campus role clarification. Depending on the size of the group and the amount of time available, role playing as well as group discussion were used. Participants learned to identify their feelings and physiological responses to situations where they felt they were trying to save a student. The importance of being aware of one's own boundaries, for example, where one feels beyond one's competence or comfort zone, and setting limits, whether time or space, were explained and discussed. The concept of saving, for instance, trying to do more for students than students do for themselves and helping, such as empowering students and encouraging them to be self-advocates was demonstrated during role plays or discussion.

Discussed at both in-service trainings, campus role clarification became an essential part of the education aspect. It was important to clarify for the participants what the roles of different departments on campus were and to emphasize the shared responsibility of departments, faculty, staff, and administrators for providing services for students with disabilities, including psychological disabilities. During the training, services that could be provided by DSPS were explained and misconceptions were clarified. Participants learned that a student with disruptive behavior will be referred to the appropriate dean and that students experiencing a psychological crisis will be referred to the mental health counselor, the college nurse, or if neither is available on campus, to the crisis intervention team. At no time were students in either of these situations referred to DSPS. Students who were experiencing difficulties in the classroom or with course related work, which might also be related to their disability, were referred to DSPS. During a student scheduled in-take interview pertinent information was gathered and necessary services and/or accommodations were addressed. Upon receiving a written verification of the disability the student obtained needed services and accommodations.

The second part of the education/information aspect was dissemination of information to community agencies which provide services to those with psychological disabilities. There were two main reasons for this part. First, it was felt that it was important to educate the community about what is available on the college campus and what level of performance is to be expected by students attending a college. Second, it was decided to provide information that would help professionals in the community make appropriate referrals, thereby hopefully avoiding that the college would be used as a day-treatment center. Knowing this information would help to maximize the success of the students who would enroll while minimizing their possible frustrations. The specialist met with the staff of the

. Department of Rehabilitation, County Mental Health, and the Mental Health Association to explain the nature of the model service site and the basics of DSPS.

Specific qualifications were required for the position of psychological disabilities specialist by the Model Service Site project at Santa Barbara City College. These included experience working with students who had psychological disabilities, experience working with college students, and an understanding of the rehabilitation model. The psychological disabilities specialist was required to have a Master's in Psychology, be licensed as either a Marriage, Family, Child Counselor or Clinical Social Worker, with at least two years experience working with adults with psychological disabilities. It was also expected that the specialist would be able to organize, network, collect and analyze data, and communicate effectively both orally and in writing.

The education/information approach worked as the staff had hoped. Campus personnel were willing to be helpful to students with psychological disabilities and were able to make appropriate referrals to DSPS. Faculty and staff also utilized the specialist when they felt uncertain about the appropriate referral of a student. One faculty member called to discuss two student cases. The student who was clearly exhibiting disruptive behavior was not a DSPS student and the faculty member was encouraged to follow through with the disruptive student guidelines. The second student was experiencing an emotional/family crisis and was in need of personal counseling. The faculty member was advised that if this student's condition were to deteriorate to the point where the student met the criteria for psychological disabilities then the student would also be served by DSPS.

The second major aspect of the SBCC approach involved course evaluation. Several existing classes, offered both by DSPS and other departments, were evaluated by the psychological disabilities specialist. The goal of this evaluation process was to determine which, if any, existing classes might provide educational support for students with psychological disabilities while enrolled in a regular college curriculum. These courses were identified as ones which might be useful for students with psychological disabilities to help them increase self awareness, self-esteem or self advocacy and improve social skills and study skills. The evaluation was done by meeting with the instructor of the course, reviewing the course outline and syllabus, and understanding how the course was taught. Specific courses in Health Education, Personal Development, and DSPS seemed most appropriate to benefit students with psychological disabilities by providing strategies to support their education in regular college level classes.

In the Health Education department, the courses on personal health awareness and personal health for women were considered to be the most appropriate. The instructor used a collection of readings and was willing to have a specific section included in the readings which pertains to the needs and experiences of those with psychological disabilities. The Personal Development department developed a new course during the 90-91 school year. This course covered college survival skills with students learning about college services, study skills, time-money management, test anxiety and stress, and other relevant issues. All three of these classes used small group projects as part of the curriculum. Enrolling in any of these three courses allowed the student to become familiar with classroom routines and often provided an opportunity for the student to begin to make friendships with other students while participating in group projects. Two specific DSPS courses, Organizational Skills and Critical Thinking

Skills, met the needs of certain students who were re-entering college or whose high school education showed a deficit in these areas.

An important finding of the SBCC Model Service Site project was that feeling separate from others on campus is one of the major obstacles faced by students with psychological disabilities. This finding supports reports from other project sites. Attending classes which include group projects appears to be one way in which students with psychological disabilities can overcome this barrier. Another way appears to be to provide a peer support group. The fundamental concept in peer support, within the psychiatric rehabilitation model, is that people with disabilities need skills and support to function in the living and learning environment of their choice (Anthony, Cohen and Cohen, 1983). The emphasis of psychiatric rehabilitation is on client involvement in the rehabilitation process itself. The student's own insights about what goals he/she wants to pursue are vital in the peer support setting. Students' interpersonal skills, not symptoms, relate most strongly to rehabilitation outcome. The peer support philosophy works by building on current strengths and on correcting deficits--not on psychiatric labels, diagnosis, or therapy (Anthony et al, 1983). The Santa Barbara City College Model Service Site has used the philosophy that peer support should be seen as a system of mutual support that is based on respect for each other's needs, strengths, contributions, and limitations. The goal is to comfort, to listen, and to share the knowledge of common experiences.

With this framework in mind, and with the liaison established at the beginning of the model service site project with County Mental Health, SBCC has been able to establish a peer support group specifically for students with psychological disabilities. Santa Barbara County Mental Health Services began a new program in January, 1992 of support services, the Self-Help and Advocacy Project. The coordinator of this project serves as a liaison between SB County Mental Health and SBCC to assist students identified as having psychological disabilities and to co-facilitate the peer support group. The group, which met once a week for one hour, was held on SBCC's campus. Students were encouraged to talk about issues of importance to them, focusing on the educational setting, to be supportive of each other within the group and on campus, and to discuss other, non-educational, issues with the County Mental Health professional upon the ending of the group meetings.

The third area of the MSS project consists of services/accommodations. In this area the project basically followed the already well-established DSPS model. The student was provided with a thorough in-take interview and assessment from self-report, followed by a written verification from a licensed therapist. The Psychological Disabilities Specialist reviewed and assessed data within the framework of an educational setting. Services were provided as necessary on an individual basis. Among other services, students received extended test taking time, use of a tape-recorder, tutorial help, and an occasional medical parking permit. The psychological disabilities specialist provided disability related counseling using a rehabilitation model, referrals to campus and community services as necessary, and supported the student to persist and succeed at the college level.

In conclusion, as the liaison position between SB County Mental Health and SBCC is a new project, it is envisioned that there are several other areas in which the Self-Help and Advocacy Project co-ordinator can be of service to students with psychological disabilities at SBCC. These include assistance with student persistence at the

college level and monitoring students with off-campus difficulties which may affect school progress. The liaison program hopes to further address the area of stigma about mental illness/psychological disabilities and work on the erasure of this stigma as well as to assist students with empowerment issues and self-advocacy at the college level. The SBCC DSPS staff felt fortunate to have the presence and support of the Self-Help co-ordinator and of SB County Mental Health Services. The relationship between County Mental Health Services and SBCC broadened the scope of services and helped to extend the resources of both institutions.

The Model Service Site project at SBCC has been an adventure and a journey. Staff and the campus community learned that students with psychological disabilities have similar needs to students with other disabilities, that they seem to require no more staff time than other disabilities, and that with appropriate support and accommodations they are successful at the college level. Data indicates that students in this population require 66.5 hours of service, while students with learning disabilities require 108 hours of service and students with hearing impairment require 318 hours of service (DSPS, 1992). During the project the psychological disabilities specialist provided services to 69 students, 29 who were referred by the Department of Rehabilitation, 2 who were referred by a private therapist, 30 who were continuing students, and 5 who were new students (Model Service Sites, 1992). It is important to note that at all four Model Service Sites, the highest referrals were from DSPS staff and other campus faculty, with the second highest referrals being self-referral. The functional limitations in an educational setting which presented most frequently at all four project sites, were difficulty completing registration process (92), easily distractible/poor concentration in class (127), and difficulty focusing during timed tests (94) (Model Service Sites, 1992). Appropriate services/accommodations, such as priority registration, extended test-taking time, and a tutorial lab, were provided at SBCC to assist with these limitations. It has been heartening to help remove some of the stigma associated with psychological disabilities and to watch individual staff and faculty take an active interest in supporting this population. Whatever the outcome of the funding process for serving students with psychological disabilities, the SBCC staff will continue to serve students with psychological disabilities.

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Personal Summary

Elaine Jacobs is currently the Psychological Disabilities Specialist in the DSPS department at SBCC. Elaine has both coordinated and provided direct services for the project during the current school year. Elaine has a master's degree in psychology from the University of California, Santa Barbara and a master's degree in folklore and folklife from the University of Pennsylvania. She is also a California licensed Marriage, Family, and Child Therapist.

Elaine has been involved in support of education for over twenty years, has taught both at SBCC and UCSB Extension, and is a current member of CAPED and AHEAD. She has had experience working with different public agencies as counselor, social worker, and educator, and has been on various committees and boards.

Selina I. Glater is currently the Self-Help and Advocacy Coordinator at Santa Barbara County Mental Health Services. She is also the liaison between County Mental Health Services and Santa Barbara Community College. Selina has a master's degree in musicology from the University of California, Santa Barbara, and additional training as a music therapist from California State University, Northridge. She has been active as an advocate for the needs of the mentally ill and has served on numerous committees and boards. Currently she sits on the Advisory Board for students with Psychological Disabilities at SBCC and is the Southern California chair of the CAPED Psychological Disabilities Division. Her present interests involve the delivery of services for the mentally ill in post-secondary education.